

In 2000, millions of acres burned in Idaho and hundreds of homes burned in other states throughout the country. The 2000 fire season stands out from the others in one major aspect; it was the culmination of a decade in which an average of 940 homes per year were lost nationwide to wildfire (Source: Firewise). This triggered the adoption of the National Fire Plan and the accompanying ten year comprehensive strategy to address the impacts of wildfire on the landscape and communities.

In 2002 the Hope 44 fire burned 360 acres near the town of Hope. This human caused fire burned in rough steep terrain and heavy vegetation making suppression efforts difficult. Fortunately there were no homes in the direct path of the fire. If this fire had occurred one-half mile further east or west along state highway 200, life and property would have been directly threatened.

In September of 2003, the 3600 acre Myrtle Creek fire threatened to burn into the Kootenai Valley in Boundary County. The fire occurred at the end of an extended hot dry period and threatened several homes on the west side of Kootenai Valley. A change to a cool moist weather pattern helped prevent this fire from becoming much larger.

Extended dry weather, as was experienced in 2003, coupled with dense vegetation, were the major factors affecting fire behavior and the severity of damage in all of the examples presented above. Dense stands of vegetation burn with higher intensity, are more difficult to suppress, and result in fires with more severe impacts than would be expected from a typical fire under natural conditions.

Table 3 shows the cumulative number of fires, by cause, and acreage for the years 1981 through 2000. A table containing the number of fires by year, cause, and acreages can be found in Appendix B.

Table 3 Cumulative Number of Wildfires by Cause and Acreage for Bonner County 1981-2000			
	Human Caused	Lightning Caused	Total
Number of Fires	833	706	1539
Number of Acres	5441	4125	9566

Source: National Fire Plan Cohesive Team Northern Regional Division for North Idaho and Montana. 2000.

Fire agencies have developed effective fire fighting techniques for use in the wildland urban interface. But the techniques developed to engage a fire at the interface can only be used if it is safe for fire crews to be there. Dense vegetation can prevent fire crews from protecting homes and businesses from wildfire.